

**Wisconsin's Top 10
Complaints in 2001**

- 1) Telecommunications
- 2) Landlord/tenant
- 3) Home improvement
- 4) Gifting pyramid
- 5) Mail order
- 6) Investments
- 7) Vehicle repair
- 8) Telemarketing
- 9) Internet providers
- 10) Magazines

WISCONSIN
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New Top 10 complaint list

Consumer Protection returns \$8.7 million to WI consumers

"So many consumers complained about **Internet service providers** last year that the category appears in Wisconsin's Top 10 complaint list for the first time," says Fran Tryon, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Ranking #9, these companies providing electronic hook-ups to the Internet had 576 written complaints. (See accompanying Top 10 list and story: "Choose Internet service wisely.")

"**Telemarketing** (#8) remains in the top 10 list with 735 complaints," says Tryon. "Consumer Protection is currently writing rules for a no call list that telemarketers will have to obey or they will be prosecuted."

Gifting pyramids moved up from #7 to #4. Consumer Protection has returned more than \$1 million to victims. Alleged kingpins face making restitution or being prosecuted.

Billing errors kept telecommunications at the top of the list with 2,242 complaints. **Landlord-tenant** remains #2; **home improvement** #3; and **motor vehicle repair** #7. **Mail order** complaints—which include items ordered over the Internet—ranked #5.

"While not making the Top 10, the biggest burst of written complaints—148—and almost 2000 calls—came when a minority of **gas stations** raised prices after Sept. 11, charging as much as \$4.78 a gallon," says Tryon. "Fast investigations by the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection resulted in an immediate lowering of raised prices across the state and more than \$500,000 in refunds to consumers."

Complaints about the Nigerian scam—con artists asking for money in return for a million-dollar fee for sneaking government money out of that county—has made **investments** category #6. The Department is working with a joint federal/state strike team to combat this consumer fraud.

All told, the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection returned more than \$8.7 million to Wisconsin consumers in 2001. "Not included in these totals are savings to consumers via hotline advice, warnings and inspections. In a satisfaction survey, consumers estimated that they saved an average of \$429. And Weights and Measure inspectors corrected a 9 percent error rate when inspecting 8,756 checkout scanners in grocery and department stores around the state.

The toll free hotline of the Bureau of Consumer Protection is 1-800-422-7128.

Choose Internet service wisely

Because complaints about Internet service providers are now in Wisconsin's Top 10 complaint list, consumers are advised to choose Internet service wisely.

Some people have received telephone bills totaling hundreds of dollars because they didn't know that their Internet access number was long distance.

People also get mad when they encounter slow page loading, price increases, and bankruptcies. And some Internet service providers keep billing your credit card or

INTERNET/TOP 10 add one

debiting your checking account after you cancel the service. For example, some consumers discover they have unknowingly paid up to a year after canceling, losing hundreds of dollars. Adding to the problem, when consumers try to contact the provider and complain they may not find a phone number or mailing address for the company. And when asking for help from their credit card company, they find out that their 60-day deadline for getting money back by chargeback has expired.

Here is advice from Consumer Protection:

- Look over your credit card and checking account bills carefully.
- Complain to Consumer Protection when you are billed for Internet services you cancelled. Call the toll free hotline: 1-800-422-7128. Or complain on line: <http://datcp.state.wi.us/>
- Check with our hotline for complaints before signing up with a provider.
- **And before signing up ask the provider if the number you will be dialing via your computer is long distance. Verify this information with your local telephone company by either looking in your telephone book or calling a customer representative (not the long distance operator).**
- Look over your monthly telephone bill carefully to make sure you are not being charged per-minute rates when accessing the Internet. You may be incurring long distance per-minute charges even if you do not dial “1” before the telephone number.
- Don’t sign long-term contracts with Internet service providers. You may find a better deal.
- Know that you can get a low-cost provider that doesn’t provide E-mail service and then use one of the many free E-mail services.

“TOP 10” CONSUMER COMPLAINTS IN 2001

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Product</u>	<u># of Written Complaints</u>
1	Telecommunications	2,242
2	Landlord/Tenant	1,649
3	Home Improvements	1,123
4	Gifting Pyramid Scheme	947
5	Mail Order Sales	937
6	Investments	866
7	Motor Vehicle Repairs	854
8	Telemarketing	735
9	Internet Service Providers	576
10	Magazines	563